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ABSTRACT

A descriptive research study of the educational outreach activities conducted by Ohio theatres used a mail questionnaire to survey the 36 professional and large community theatres within the state. Thirty responded, for a response rate of 83.3 percent. For each theatre, the instrument sought information on the kind of theatre, the number of staff, number of paid hours worked by staff, the number of main stage and other productions performed each year, staff titles, the kinds of staff training offered, the criteria used to select productions, and activities. Those activities that were reported by more than half the respondents included developing brochures (93.3 percent), posters (86.7 percent), newspaper advertising (70 percent), radio commercials (60 percent), program notes on performers and staff (93.3 percent), program notes on subject matter (83.3 percent), program notes on authors (76.7 percent), newspaper critiques (80 percent), public speaking by staff (76.7 percent), and postperformance receptions (66.7). Various conclusions were inferred from the data, among them that: (1) more audience education is necessary in view of the criteria for play selection, which include "challenge to audience"; (2) more training of volunteers is needed; (3) although theatres purport to be educational, most of their activities concern marketing or audience development; (4) there are very few education directors and volunteer coordinators in the theatres surveyed; and (5) fewer than half those surveyed do any outreach for special constituencies, including providing Artists-in-the-schools programs. (14 references) (CML)

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AN ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH BY OHIO THEATRES

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Introduction and Need

"Art is a way of perceiving and responding."
(Farber, 1982, p.10)

The arts are those fields of study in which creators, performers, technicians, and audience come together. Using this definition, one can describe the productions of theatre, dance, opera and music as the performing arts where the four necessary components most successfully meet.

In the culture of the United States, the arts are viewed as a leisure as opposed to a work pursuit for most people. There is, however, a "work value" ethic in this society that reduces leisure to a trivial level (Verduin and McEwen, 1984). Yet, as Kaplan notes, "an increasing number of adult students...now come seeking educational and intellectual experiences in the liberal arts...purely for their own satisfaction and intellectual development" (1960, p.3). Verduin and McEwen (1984) also stress the value of liberal arts and leisure education by pointing out that while leisure education is one of the seven principles of secondary eduction, little is done to educate youth in this area. Indeed, the arts and music are often the first programs eliminated from schools in times of financial stress.

Research indicates that persons who received arts education as children are much more likely to participate in arts activities as adults (DiMaggio and Useem, 1980; Orend, 1987). Those who are socialized in the arts at a later age are still more likely to participate than persons without such exposure. For adults no longer enrolled in formal schooling, the arts organizations themselves, including theatre companies, are the most likely providers of education for appreciation of the arts.

For the arts to have meaning, there must be a commitment to the arts in

lifelong learning. Browne suggests, "once you separate art from the useful purpose it was designed to serve and put it in a museum, it becomes dead and adoration of it is worship of a stuffed animal, a corpse" (1973, p.2). Sontag adds, "the most interesting and creative art of our time is not open to the generally educated; it demands special effort; it speaks a specialized language" (1973, p.27) implying the need for education in lifelong appreciation of the arts. Verduin and McEwen sum this importance by saying "learning and self discovery are perhaps the greatest of all leisure potentials. They add meaning to our lives and contribute to our personal satisfaction" (1984, p.112). Dicke simply notes that the "appreciability of a work of art...is potential value which in a given case may never be realized" (1974, p.43). Finally, Morison and Dalgleish in their counter to the view that one need not know anything about art to appreciate art, reflect that "opening up attitudes toward new ideas and experiences that challenge the mind and the imagination seems particularly important in helping people feel comfortable with the arts" (1987, p101).

Van Almen Connel stressed the importance in art for developing increased tolerance for differences (1977). Two factors complicate the view that children schooled in arts appreciation will not need lifelong learning experiences. First, the arts are dynamic. Art changes; even historic works change with each new viewing. Performance is temporal and relies on the willing suspension of disbelief when the audience meets the performers. Second, as indicated above, the grounding adults had in the arts is often inadequate-- even as we remove criticism and arts appreciation from primary and secondary curricula.

The responsibility then falls on the arts organizations themselves, those actually responsible for the performances, to provide this lifelong education. The goal in education is not necessarily altruistic; rather it is for attract-

ing the "potential" audience (Morison & Dalgleish, 1987). Leonard Bernstein, in the introduction to his book The Joy of Music (1959) supports the need for education and audience building by commenting, "the public is not a great beast, but an intelligent organism, more often than not longing for insight and knowledge". Much of the education is in the performance, the works performed, and in getting the people through the door.

Alvin Toffler, the futurist, complained about the paucity of research as a basis for informed decision-making in arts administration: "It is safe to say that in no other significant field is the existing data base flimsier." (1970, p.59). The National Endowment for Arts has sponsored recent studies of participation in arts activities which should be valuable for arts planners (for example, Robinson, et al., 1987), but much more remains to be investigated.

To receive 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, every non-profit organization must operate for one of these purposes: charitable, religious, education, scientific, or literary. The IRS instructions (1985) recommend that cultural organizations, such as museums, symphonies, and theatres, claim to be educational. However, is the mere presentation of performance educational in itself? If educational outreach is provided beyond performing, what is the extent and quality of such education?

The Study

These broad questions formed the basis for this descriptive survey research. The objectives for study were as follow:

- Obtain a frame of self-identified professional or large community theatres within the state of Ohio;
- Identify the range of educational activities provided by theatre companies in the state of Ohio;

- o Enumerate the job titles of persons providing lifelong theatre education in Ohio; and
- o Begin the process of moving beyond the descriptive level of research in the field.

Methodology

Type of study. For this descriptive study, data were collected through use of a survey instrument designed to elicit demographics. Frequencies, means and information reported were used for the data analysis.

Population. The population for this study included all self-identified professional and semi-professional theatres in Ohio. The population frame was provided by the Ohio Theatre Alliance from its member theatre list. The survey was census: 30 of 36 responded for an 83.3% response rate. Of those not responding, two are agencies for performers. The remaining 4 (11.1%) non-respondents are known to the authors and are similar in size, scope, personnel and season to some of the theatres responding.

Instrumentation. A survey instrument was developed from the literature. Content validity was provided by a panel of experts. Face validity and reliability were conducted through a pilot of non-related individuals. The data solicited were demographic and descriptive, therefore reliability was not originally perceived as an issue. The results will address reliability issues in consideration of the reporting process. In the instrument, categories of responses were not identified and were randomly mixed so as not to bias response toward a category.

Process. The instrument was mailed with stamped, addressed return envelope to the population followed by a second mailing to non-respondents. Data were compiled and presented as follows. Generalization is limited to the census studied.

RESULTS

Of the respondents, eleven identified themselves as professional Equity theatre companies, eight as professional non-Equity, one as professional with paid staff, seven as community theatres with paid permanent staff and one as community with no paid permanent staff. These thirty theatres hire 315 full time staff members, 214 part-time staff members working 50% time or more and 303 staff members who work less than 50% time. The median number of mainstage productions is 5 per year; the mean number of mainstage productions is 4.7 per year. One to three other annual productions is both median and mean.

The single most common staff title is Artistic Director (24 or 80%), followed by Technical Director (21 or 70%) and Marketing/PR Director (18 or 60%). There are 16 Box Office Directors (53.3%), 11 Managing Directors (36.7%),10 Volunteer Coordinators (33.3%) and 6 Education Directors (20%). There were 39 titles given beyond the 9 provided in the questionnaire. These will be discussed in conclusions and recommendations.

The following table illustrates the response numbers and percents of respondents in the categories of Media, Special Performances, Patron Print Education, Theatre Education Efforts and Audience Building Education Efforts in which over half the respondents claimed activity. Appendix A contains the complete table.

Activity	n	% Responses
MEDIA		
Brochures	28	93.3
Posters	26	86.7
Newspaper Advertising	21	70.0
Radio Commercials	18	60.0
Subscribers Newsletter	16	53.3
Television Commercials	16	53.3
PATRON PRINT		
Program Notes:		
Performers/Staff	28	93.3
Subject Matter	25	83.3
Author	23	76.7
Newspaper Critiques	24	80.0
AUDIENCE BUILDING		
Public Speaking by Staff	23	76.7
Post Performance Receptions	20	66.7
Post Performance Discussions	15	50.0

Not listed are all Special Performance Categories (Senior Citizen, Handicap, touring productions, Informances), all Theatre Education (Adult and Youth Workshops, Artists-in-the-Schools, Acting and Dance classes), and lectures under audience building.

"Learn By Doing" is the predominant method of volunteer training with 66.7% of the respondents identifying this method. Of formal training or workshops offered, only formal training for ushers (13 or 43.3%) and formal training for box office (11 or 36.7) percent of the theatres received more than a 30 percent response.

When asked if "you had your wishes, where would you be" regarding subscription versus box office ratio, 6 respondents hoped for subscriptions of over 71%, five wanted a ratio of 70:30, three a ratio of 50:50, and two each a ratio of 40:60, 60:40, and Box of over 71%. This question did not apply to the outdoor dramas or the free theatre. Seven of the respondents were unable to answer the question or answered the question with more than one response.

Productions are selected by the theatres surveyed using a wide range of

criteria. Challenge to the audience (63.3%) was the most common inclusion with New Work/Regional Premier Work (60%) a close second.

OBSERVATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The descriptive data collected led these authors to ten observations. These observations (in no particular) serve as the conclusions of this study and lead to recommendations for future action both in research and in application.

1. In view of methods of play selection (challenge to audience and new works), more audience education is necessary.

2. More training of volunteers is needed. Volunteers often offer the public the first contact with the theatre. One hopes it is not the last. Specific needs for volunteer training should be identified and routine volunteer training programs developed.

3. Although theatres purport to be "educational," most of their activities appear to be more marketing or ticket sales audience development oriented (brochures, posters, program notes, public speaking, receptions). Clearly, the two goals are linked, but seeing a production and understanding it are not the same. We suspect greater understanding would lead to better audience retention and raised expectations of audience members in theatre overall.

4. There is an apparent inconsistency in job or position titles between theatres. Future inquiry in job responsibilities for the various positions across theatres is necessary for the profession to begin a process of standardization which would enhance professional movement and development.

5. There are relatively few Education Directors and Volunteer Coordinators in the theatres surveyed, and those are usually found only in the larger organizations. How large must a staff be before the theatre hires an educator?

6. Should there be a distinction between the titles of paid staff and voluntary staff in professional theatres?

7. Less than half the theatres surveyed do any outreach for special constituencies.

8. Only one-third of the theatres participate in "Artists-in-the-Schools". Today's youth are tomorrow's subscribers or nonsubscribers. (See data on arts socialization by Warren.)

9. Is there a relationship between subscription: box office ratio and educational efforts of a theatre?

10. Given the attention to marketing strategies, theatre activity in the state of Ohio should be well-known. Informal discussion with people not involved in the arts suggests otherwise. What is the impact of marketing strategies currently employed? What impact would alternative marketing (or audience building educational) efforts have on the public perception of professional theatre in Ohio?

Arts education is viewed by many as the only approach to audience building. The field of leisure education stresses the importance of understanding that which fills the leisure time. The suggestions are strong for the need for professional theatres in Ohio to reevaluate their educational efforts and incorporate education as a means of securing return patrons with increasing expectations from the art.

APPENDIX A

Activity	N	% Responses	Additional
MEDIA			
Brochures	28	93.3	
Posters	26	86.7	
Newspaper Advertising	21	70.0	
Radio Commercials	18	60.0	
Subscribers Newsletter	16	53.3	
Television Commercials	16	53.3	
SPECIAL PERFORMANCES			
Private Performances	14	46.7	
Touring Productions	13	43.3	1,181 Performances to Schools/Colleges Senior Centers, Festivals
Handicapped	12	40.0	ASL, Audio Description, Additional Location
Senior Citizens	9	30.0	
Informances	6	20.0	
PATRON PRINT			
Program Notes:			
Performers/Staff	28	93.3	
Subject Matter	25	83.3	
Author	23	76.7	
Newspaper Critiques	24	80.0	
Radio/TV Critiques	12	40.0	
Magazine Critiques	12	40.0	
THEATRE EDUCATION			
Adult Workshops	12	40.0	Oral History, New Plays, Playwriting, Acting in ASL, Mime, Clown, Technical
Artists in the Schools	10	33.3	
Acting Classes	10	33.3	
Youth Workshops	7	23.3	Technical, Acting in ASL, Singing, Makeup
Dance Classes	2	6.7	
AUDIENCE BUILDING			
Public Speaking by Staff	23	76.7	
Post Performance Receptions	20	66.7	
Post Performance Discussions	15	50.0	
Pre-Performance Lectures	7	23.3	
Lecture Series	4	13.3	

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